

Tasmania *Together* and *Growing Victoria Together*.¹ Can State Plans Deliver Environmental Sustainability?

Our review of the two state plans should not be mistaken for an endorsement of their achievements, however, but rather as recognition of their potential for the pursuit of environmental sustainability, in spite of any of the shortcomings we have observed. Kate Crowley and Brian Coffey²



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ABSTRACT

Sustainability has always been a contested term, environmental sustainability in particular. It presents challenges and opportunities for policy making at all levels. This paper suggests that state plans have a key role to play in the pursuit of sustainability. It argues that, in theory, sustainability requires well integrated, interactive, informed and informing, as well as institutionalised policy processes. It reviews state plans in Tasmania and Victoria to analyse their capacity for delivering sustainability. *Tasmania Together* and *Growing Victoria Together* are very different plans, so very different conclusions are drawn here, however we find that both of them lack the explicit political and policy commitment to sustainability that is required to turn rhetoric into state planning practice.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the long history of environmental issues, sustainability offers a relatively recent policy opportunity at the sub-national level of government. The popularisation of the idea of sustainable development in the mid 1980s opened up the policy field in ways which now mean that it is no longer marginal, but a mainstream concern. In the 1987 international report *Our Common Future*, sustainability was defined as taking actions today that will not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED 1987). Australia defines sustainability in its *National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development* as 'using, conserving and enhancing the community's resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are maintained, and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased' (Cwlth 1992: 128). At the sub-national level, Western Australia defines sustainability as meeting the needs of current and future generations through simultaneous environmental, social and economic improvement (Government of Western Australia 2003). It is the OECD, however, that has been stressing the closer procedural attention that is needed to governance practices, policy coherence and integration, that is the focus of this paper, if sustainability rhetoric is to promote real action for real change. Sustainability remains a huge challenge for OECD countries where 'a number of global or widely shared national environmental problems—climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, water scarcity, and overfishing—continue to worsen' (OECD 2002: 1).

This paper considers environmental sustainability at the sub-national level and the potential of state planning processes to deliver it. Our sub-national focus is on the Bacon Government's *Tasmania Together* and the Bracks Government's *Growing Victoria Together* State plans³. Both are high-level, medium term (10-20 year) strategic plans that incorporate aspirations that have been generated from the bottom up in Tasmania and from the top down in Victoria. Both frameworks are underpinned by sustainability to some degree, certainly in the sense of being 'well developed and widely distributed policy framework(s), setting out economic, social and environmental objectives' (Bridgman and Davis 2000, 91). Other Australian states are moving in this direction. Western Australia is most notably a sustainability leader for having established a Sustainability Policy Unit within the Department of Premier and Cabinet, a Sustainability Roundtable to advise the Premier, and has adopted Australia's first *State Sustainability Strategy* (Government of Western Australia 2003). So we argue that an examination of the OECD's concern that improved governance is needed to achieve sustainability can now be aimed in timely fashion at the sub-national level.

Our two case studies present very different stakeholder involvements in state planning processes.

Our emphasis in this paper is upon policy as a process of interaction and integration, but we do acknowledge, as OECD does, the significance of stakeholders in sustainability decision-making. Although our focus is not participatory policy making, we believe that there are good models for citizen engagement in the design of sustainability programs that could be integrated into sub-national processes (Connors and Dovers 2004). Our two case studies present very different stakeholder involvements in state planning processes, with Tasmania more boldly deriving its planning vision from extensive public engagement. Indeed our review highlights the contrast between Tasmania's innovative bottom-up visioning and Victoria's more conventional but also innovative strategic planning. There is much to learn, we argue, from the capacity of the Tasmanian program to engage citizens across many dimensions, socio-economic, geographic, generational and so forth which is critical to achieving workable state policies and in our case, sustainability outcomes (see also Crowley 2005). However the capacity of less deliberative but more strategically driven, top down policy-making to transform state planning and shift policy practices onto a sustainable basis as Victoria proposes is not to be underestimated. We would therefore agree with many sustainability authors that there is no one best

governance model, nor one best participatory practice for pursuing sustainability.

POLICY MAKING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The importance of environmental sustainability is well recognised by United Nations Earth Summits, national and sub-national plans, community and individual action, and corporate initiatives. Moreover, a wide range of policies and programs for aspects of environmental management and sustainability have been established and implemented. However, the effectiveness of past and present approaches to sustainability is increasingly being recognised as limited, ad hoc, reactive, partial and even at times contradictory (OECD 2002). In Australia, for instance, sustainability planning at the national level, through the 1992 National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainability (NSED) has proved a frustrating exercise that has met with much criticism. Once devised through an innovative, if difficult, NSED working group process, the recommendations and strategy were much diluted with no secretariat established to guide them nor any implementation plan (Harris and Throsby 1997:13-14). Whilst the rhetorical battle for sustainability has been won, with sustainability reflected globally in policy preambles at the national, sub-national and local levels, the same cannot be said for sustainability as workable policy with real outcomes.

The contemporary concern about sustainability has roots in earlier eras, in the 1970s for instance when the concern was much more with balancing the environment and development, often in arbitrary fashion at a political whim, a practice that persists in state decision-making today. The concern and resultant language became much more sophisticated in the 1980s as a result of the work by the OECD and others to ensure that enhanced economic growth in developed countries was not at the expense of society and the environment. This became the era of sustainable development, or sustainability, which in Europe at least moved some way in the 1990s towards a preoccupation, more broadly, with ways of achieving ecologically sensitive modernity. Indeed this evolution of progressive environmental thinking to embrace what in western industrialised countries is known as 'ecological modernisation', is in part a reflection of the failed notion of sustaining development and the need to refocus around ecological priorities (Crowley 1999). Ecological modernisation is a distinctive approach for assuming that, whilst environmental problems are a direct consequence of our social and economic systems, it is possible to transform these in ways that are environmentally sustainable (Hajer 1995; Weale 1998; Mol 1996; Skou-Andersen & Massa 2000; Young 2000).

Ecological modernisation is a distinctive approach.

This sort of transformation is exactly what we propose with our pragmatic argument that state plans at the sub-national level such as *Tasmania Together* and *Growing Victoria Together* offer great potential as vehicles for pursuing sustainability. Both Minnesota Milestones (established in 1992) and the Oregon Benchmarks program (established in 1989) are sub-national state plans upon which *Tasmania Together*, at least, was partly based. Neither program was explicitly established with sustainability aspirations in mind, but these aspirations soon followed. In Minnesota's case, there was recognition of 'the interplay between economic, environmental and social wellbeing' although the Milestones's effort 'lacked an understanding (of sustainability) and the basic connection between the issues'. A Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative was established in 1993 and worked through a lengthy and complex number of processes that eventually saw the incorporation of at least some sustainability ideas into the revised version of *Minnesota Milestones* in 2002 (Wells 2003:3-8). The Oregon Benchmarks program also began looking for sustainability connections in 2000 and sponsored research that recast existing performance measures into tools for policy makers interested in incorporating sustainability into policy making (Schlossberg and Zimmerman 2003).

We suggest that these sorts of efforts, combined with the OECD's recommendations for improved governance to achieve sustainability, provide the means of transforming the *Tasmania Together* and *Growing Victoria Together* processes in the interests of pursuing sustainability. We are therefore interested in this paper in other than the content of the plans, although we are concerned that sub-national planning should emphasise ecological capital as much as social and economic capital. We argue here that the articulation of visions, goals and indicators by which to measure progress at the sub-national level is a more meaningful exercise where there is attention to the governance issues of policy integration, interaction, information and institutionalisation⁴. We acknowledge that our focus upon environmental sustainability is a limited one that suits our own interests in ecological transformation and that it is for others to pursue social and economic sustainability. We begin by reiterating the difficulties that the environment poses for policy making and by sorting responses to these difficulties into policy integration, interaction, information and institutionalisation efforts. Throughout the paper we draw upon the OECD's (2002b) program for

improving policy coherence and integration for sustainable development, but we apply this to the sub-national context when we turn to our review of *Tasmania Together* and *Growing Victoria Together*. Again a limitation of this review is that it is a process analysis rather than a content analysis. It is looking to see how the state plans were generated, how they integrate with other processes, the degree of interaction they involve, the information upon which they rest, their institutionalisation and thus longevity.

THE ENVIRONMENT AS A POLICY PROBLEM

The environment presents particular policy problems. It has not responded well to piecemeal bureaucratic efforts, nor to efforts isolated from the community, nor to efforts made in the absence of good information, nor to efforts that lack institutional backing and adequate resourcing. For that reason, we argue here that sustainability policy must be 'well integrated, interactive, informed and informing, and institutionalised'⁵. Part of the difficulty in actually solving environmental problems has long been the compartmentalised conception of such problems and the failure to address the tensions between environmental, social and economic policy demands. Whilst new institutions have emerged to deal with these tensions, the OECD sees these as having largely failed to better integrate environmental, social and economic goals within their mandates (OECD 2002b: 2). Narrow, fragmented and ultimately inadequate definitions of environmental solutions are the result, with major implications for policy. Conception does greatly affect policy design: i.e. 'whether or not environmental problems appear as anomalies to the existing institutional arrangements depends first of all on the way in which these problems are framed and defined' (Hajer 1995, 4).

Environmental problems are atypical in many ways (see Carter 2001, Dovers 1997, 1999, Walker 1992), initially to do with the complexity of biophysical systems; the manifestation of impacts across space and time, and the often irreversible effects of ecological damage. But they are atypical as well for countering and potentially constraining economic priorities in particular, and so for challenging political priorities and the capacity of policy makers (Crowley 2003). Policy making for sustainability, with environmental protection and long term policy effectiveness at its core, is thus a major challenge with two interrelated, elements: i.e. the:

- (magnitude of the problem) Current efforts are not sufficient to address pressing environmental

constraints (e.g. loss of biodiversity, salinisation, climate change); and the

- (nature of the problem) Complexity of environmental sustainability issues means that they are bigger than any one organisation acting alone can handle and require systemic effort.

This means that many existing models for analysing and informing policy processes are also inadequate for resolving issues of environmental sustainability because they have been:

- developed for other purposes (for example: service delivery, social, or economic policy), or
- designed with discrete linear, rather than systemic, approaches to policy making in mind.

Experience has shown, however, that environmental policy integration is less than straight forward (Janicke 2003).

The OECD proposes improved governance for sustainability because the impact of defective governance in terms of environmental and ultimately social decline is now very clear. It advocates a common understanding of sustainability, clear commitment and leadership on sustainability, specific mechanisms to steer integration, effective stakeholder involvement, and effective knowledge management (OECD 2002b). We argue that as part of improving the sub-national governance response to the global challenge of environmental sustainability, policy must be well integrated, interactive, informed and informing, and institutionalised as part of state planning processes.

Policy Making that is Integrated⁶

Whilst one of the defining features of sustainability is its emphasis on the integration of environmental objectives, this is not just into non-environmental policy sectors, but across and between government at all levels, and out into partnerships with the community and private sectors. The OECD (2002b) sees integration as an overarching goal, beyond the quick fix, and about specific commitments by governments to economy, environment and society in equal measure, with the required institutional adjustments being made to turn commitment into practice. The idea of environmental integration is not new, having featured in classics like *Blueprint for Survival* (1972), *World Conservation Strategy* (1980), and *Our Common Future* (1987). So what does it mean?

Two different forms of integration are typically identified as follows:

- Horizontal (or inter-sectoral) integration pursues a coordinated and coherent strategy across different agencies and sectors (e.g. whole of government approaches);
- Vertical (or intra-sectoral) integration focuses on the integrated management of a single natural resource (legislation, policy, governance, investment and delivery aligned) (see Carter 2001).

Experience has shown, however, that environmental policy integration is less than straight forward (Janicke 2003). Scrase and Sheate (2002) confirm its complexity by identifying fourteen different meanings in the environmental assessment and governance literature⁷. As a result, successful integration is not easy to define. Indeed, Hertin and Berkhout (2003, 40) observe that although the question of how an integrated approach to the environment can be positively implemented has been debated for decades, policy practice is largely unchanged. The Productivity Commission inquiry into the implementation of ecological sustainability by the Commonwealth Government makes it clear that there is room for improved practice (Crowley 2000, Productivity Commission 1999).

So integration is no easy policy panacea (Scrase and Sheate 2002), but requires consideration by policy makers and shapers in terms of how best to pursue sustainability aspirations. Integration does, however, mirror the complexity of systemic problems, and emphasises the benefit of pursuing multiple pathways in seeking to resolve complex issues. But the OECD's integration agenda for sustainability is quite practical and clear. It includes making a commitment, raising awareness, sustaining effort, monitoring by a central agency, budgeting for the long term, providing incentives and mainstreaming sustainability into regular policy processes. Effort should be holistic, not compartmentalised and narrow, it should reflect the complexity of the issues, and it should include participation and deliberation by all stakeholders, public, private and community (OECD 2002b: 3).

Policy Making that is Interactive

Multiple policy pathways and integrative environmental sustainability policy approaches do not sit easily with the traditional 'top down—bottom up' policy approaches in liberal democracies. 'Top down—bottom up' policy making refers to contrasting styles of policy development and implementation (Davis, Wanna, Warhurst & Weller 1993, 184). 'Top down' policy is considered rational, with successful implementation measured by how well implementing officials do their job. 'Bottom up' policy is about dealing with unexpected contingencies and acknowledges that implementing officials may well redesign policy during implementation (Howlett & Ramesh 1995, 153). Given

the complexity of environmental sustainability, and the need for sustainability policy to involve all sectors of government, business and the community, it is clear that neither of these approaches is sufficient. Much more suitable is cross-cutting, joined-up policy, and the engagement of policy networks that focus on the interconnections between policy actors, agencies and sectors, and transcend 'top down—bottom up' policy distinctions (IPAA 2002).

Growing acceptance of the view that sustainability imposes holistic and complex challenges on policy-making certainly makes the 'top down—bottom up' distinction hard to maintain. What is needed instead is more contemporary, interactive policy-making (Akkerman, Hajer and Grin 2004), such as we are seeing anyway as policy makers pursue more overt community engagement. More engaged policy-making has become an obvious tool for addressing public cynicism about politics, distrust of politicians, and political passivity, and is well suited to pursuing environmental sustainability. It involves the state reaching out to the community in partnership, rather than imposing policy on the community or having the community design policy on its own (Davis & Weller 2001). And it acknowledges conflict and allows for negotiating concepts like sustainability.

Which brings us to the need for environmental sustainability policy that is informed and informing.

The OECD sees the institutional challenge of the sustainability agenda as one involving all stakeholders, but it still describes a 'top down' role for government in both establishing integrated internal processes and in fostering constructive discussion between invariably conflicting points of view. Innovative decision-making is called for, beyond traditional arrangements, crossing sectoral boundaries, requiring innovative partnerships, and utilising fair, transparent and efficient processes (OECD 2002b: 3). Interaction is by its very nature a multi-faceted concept, with 'top down—bottom up' interconnections, but more and more with multiple policy pathways that are both rational and contingent, that involve policy communities, partnerships and joined-up governance practices.

Policy Making that is Informed and Informing

Thus far we have argued for integrative sustainability policy-making that exploits multiple policy pathways and that joins up the internal efforts of the state, the

various levels of government that constitute the state, and actors and sectors that are formally external to the state. This has been the policy push implicit in the Landcare, Natural Heritage Trust and Natural Resource Management initiatives that had their genesis with the corporatist environmental approach of the Hawke Labor Government in the late 1980s (Crowley 2001). This partnership approach was not confined to environmental policy-making, however, nor has it been broadly adopted as environmental policy practice. Community effort in the absence of appropriate knowledge and expertise, can, however, reduce the effectiveness of policy (Howard 1999). The OECD (2002b) also observes that whilst scientific knowledge should be the basis for sustainability planning, conclusive evidence may not be available, and that governments must therefore be prepared to stimulate the production of data.

Which brings us to the need for environmental sustainability policy that is informed and informing. According to Yencken, environmental policy-making may be influenced by a number of factors. These include: assessments of the severity of environmental problems, assessments of the size of response required, an understanding of the driving forces, different paradigm or discourses, and the comparative weight given to social and economic compared to environmental concerns (2002, 78-81). If any of these factors are neglected, then the policy solutions devised will be inappropriate. Effective policy thus requires an ongoing commitment to, and continuity of, knowledge generation and review. In the case of data being unavailable, the OECD recommends that partnerships be encouraged by government policies to mobilise finances for research and development, and to ensure that the knowledge generated is widely shared, debated and understood (OECD 2002a: 5).

Decision-making that is well informed by appropriate data is particularly critical for sustainability where adaptive approaches to management are required in order to deal with the emergence of new knowledge (Dovers 1999). Related to this is the need for ongoing review during implementation, as well as effective monitoring, evaluation and reporting that provides the means for tracking and reviewing progress. Independent state of environment (SOE) reporting processes provide one mechanism to authoritatively demonstrate and review progress towards sustainability. SOE processes also need to inform policy-making, such as through legislative requirements for reporting frameworks, public participation processes, recommendations for government, and requirements for government to prepare responses to these recommendations. Processes must also be informing,

that is compiling data for evidence-based policy making (Nutley *et al* 2003) in an open, transparent manner and with the institutional capacity to debate, discuss and determine courses of action.

Policy Making that is Institutionalised

Despite some useful experiments with institutional reform, Australian governments have not paid much attention to institutional design for environmental sustainability, with the notable exception of West Australia. However, institutions and the process of institutionalisation are both important for policy-making for sustainability because institutions, as durable patterns of rules and behaviours, can encourage or constrain sustainability (Dovers 1999). The value of institutionalising sustainability can be argued in terms of green planning. To enhance the chances of survival of a green plan, the green planning process must be institutionalised by legislation that requires the plan to be updated or revised every three or four years (Buhrs 2000). Institutionalisation in this sense is a formal arrangement, to which the OECD (2002b) adds informal avenues such as political commitment, awareness raising and a well communicated sense of immediacy. There is also a need to actively disseminate understanding within government, and to ensure generational continuity that avoids the loss of knowledge with the moving on of public officials (Harris & Throsby, 1997: 13).

The institutionalisation of a formal process is no guarantee that an idea will be effective or even that it will be taken seriously, though it does reduce its vulnerability to the vagaries of politics. An idea that is institutionalised is less likely to be dropped at a whim by a Minister who sees no merit in it. For sustainability efforts to succeed however, they require formal and informal institutionalisation, by being well supported politically in particular, but also by champions at influential levels. Clear commitment is required at the highest level in the formulation and implementation of sustainability strategies, indeed commitment that is clearly communicated. However leadership does not stop there, it must also be expressed through a sequence of priorities over time, and with a sense of urgency being maintained despite the longer term nature of sustainability issues (OECD 2002b: 5).

Institutionalisation is also about a very challenging 'embedding', or joining-up and integrating of sustainability efforts across agencies, between levels of government, and in partnership with the private and non-government sectors in the terms already discussed above. For any such broad-based policy initiative to succeed, it needs to proceed as we have seen from strong political commitment, but it needs furthermore to be launched from a position of strength within government. The sustainability agenda will need

strength of will and organization to succeed and the catalysing agency needs to be in a position where it can cut through bureaucratic silos and sectoral interest (OECD 2002: 6). Institutional arrangements must also be considered (Jenkins 2002) in pursuing sustainability: organisational design (structural arrangements); management processes (implementation mechanisms); and legislative provisions (statutory backing). Legislation must assert sustainability principles, provide for sustainability to be used as an assessment process, establish mechanisms for mitigation and compensation, and establish monitoring requirements, adaptive mechanisms and a capacity for enforcement (Jenkins 2002, 250).

So how well served is sustainability by the Tasmania and Victoria state planning processes, if these succeed best when well integrated, interactive, informed and informing, and institutionalised?

SUSTAINABILITY AND SUB NATIONAL PLANNING

Tasmania *Together*

Grass Roots State Planning

Tasmania *Together* is an Australian first, a people-driven twenty year social, environmental and economic plan, but one that was also strongly driven in terms of leadership, conviction and process from the very top by the late Labor Premier Jim Bacon. It has moved policy intentions in the state to the longer term with the community shaping its own aspirations in terms of culture, democracy, economy and environment, and with these affecting the budgets and planning of government agencies. It was initiated in 1999 and used formal and informal consultative techniques broadly across the state guided by a Community Leaders Group which generated a draft plan for further consultation and feedback before the Tasmania *Together* plan was finally launched in 2001 (CLG 2000; Kent 2000). The social, environmental and economic plan includes a community owned and generated vision, twenty four goals, and two hundred and twelve benchmarks that are ambitious but measurable so that progress towards achieving the aspirations of the plan can be monitored and reported on every year. The goals and benchmarks in the plan do not explicitly plan for sustainability, but effectively that is what the community is seeking by devising a plan that aspires to integrated forward progress for the state in terms of very specific, long term social, environmental and economic outcomes.

A Plan that is Integrated

Tasmania *Together* is arguably a vehicle for best practice in terms of sub-national policy integration in general, and sustainability integration in particular. It meets virtually all of Scrase and Sheate's (2002) diverse environmental policy-based integration criteria and the OECD's (2002b) and Productivity Commission's (1999) criteria for the administration of integrative practice. This is because Tasmania *Together* is a tool intended to reorient how governments govern, and pushes public preferences across agencies forcing them to join up in pursuit of Tasmania *Together* goals. It is a plan derived from consultation with the community, and ongoing community engagement is part of its implementation and monitoring, including oversight by an independent Progress Board⁸, forums across the state, newsletters, website news and feedback, benchmark reference groups drawn from the community, and issue-based coalitions of interests. There is engagement with the community and private sector through a Partnerships Program involving agreement on Tasmania *Together* goals and the actions expected between the partners and the Progress Board. There is a formal *horizontal* integration process whereby government agencies plan against, budget for and report upon Tasmania *Together* goals and benchmarks, and a *vertical* integration whereby local government reports against goals and benchmarks in partnership agreements with the state.

Tasmania Together is arguably a vehicle for best practice in terms of sub-national policy integration in general, and sustainability integration in particular.

A Plan that is Interactive

In terms of interactive policy-making, Tasmania *Together* thus exploits multiple pathways. A feature of its innovation, however, is in meshing a 'bottom up' deliberatively derived plan, with a 'top down' political commitment and authority, to redefine state planning as an interactive process. Progress on sustainability planning requires such an approach, with rationality and broad strategy guiding a process that is nevertheless striving to capture community generated dynamism and diversity, with Tasmania *Together* showing in a very practical sense that this can actually work. It also shows that whilst the interaction is necessarily planned for, defined and resourced, it is not static, as formal notions of the policy cycle

suggests, but is an ongoing feature of the process. Also a part of contemporary interactive policy-making is the notion of being 'wired-up' (UKCO 2000), not only interconnected along multiple pathways, but electronically connected, able to exchange data, with regional communities accessing online centres. Tasmania's *Service Tasmania* electronic network and its regional online access centres have been singled out in a national study for best practice integrated, interactive, interconnected electronic servicing (IPAA 2002). Furthermore, coalitions of interests fostered by Tasmania *Together* provide deliberative space for debating meaning, which sustainability planning most certainly requires.

A Plan that is Informed and Informing

Thus far, Tasmania *Together* meets the requirements for sustainability planning by being innovative, cross-sectoral, partnership based, fair, transparent and efficient (OECD 2002b: 3). Its biggest challenge in our schema is the need to be informed and informing, most immediately by linking to the expert knowledge generated by assessment processes such as State of Environment reporting (RPDC 2003). It is important to appreciate, however, that policy does not operate upon hard facts alone. It uses evidence from 'expert knowledge; published research; existing statistics; stakeholder consultations; previous policy evaluations; the internet; outcomes from consultation; costings of policy options; output from economic and statistical modelling' (SPMT 1999). The Tasmania *Together* process has nevertheless engaged in the very challenging 'wiring-up' of data to feed into its plan, breaking each of its goals into benchmarks or standards that in turn each require indicators, targets and links to data sets. This is an iterative process because invariably not all the data needed is available and strong links have been made to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It is entirely possible, the OECD (2002b) concedes, that definitive evidence will never be available, in which case institutional capacity for decision-making in the absence of evidence and as a means of dealing with conflicting views is needed, again available through Tasmania's Resource Planning and Development Commission (RPDC).

A Plan that is Institutionalised

Probably the greatest leap forward for sustainability in Tasmania would be to pursue the RPDC's recommendations to 'provide mechanisms to assist with the delivery of the Tasmania *Together* goals and benchmarks' using the RPDC's own policy and planning instruments (RPDC 2003: 8.19).

Both *Tasmania Together* and the Tasmanian State of Environment reporting and monitoring process are legislatively mandated, with both revised and reissued in a good timeframe every five years, and both required to present their reports to State Parliament. The material they both release is part of the process of 'informing' not only policy makers, but all Tasmanians in detail about the state of their state and its environment. These are both extremely successful institutionalised processes. *Tasmania Together* is managed by an independent, legislatively mandated Progress Board. However, the Board steers the implementation of *Tasmania Together* with the understanding that it is not owned by the state in any way. *Tasmania Together's* vision and goals belong to the community and are intended to be pursued by the community, its individuals, groups, public and private interests, including the Progress Board, and by all three levels of government. Of the formal process of institutionalisation, what remains is a good linking up of processes and data, but of the informal, again a great leap forward is still to be achieved in the community taking ownership of and a part in its own future.

Achieving Sustainability in Tasmania

Tasmania's State of Environment report shows that the state still has a considerable way to go to achieve sustainability (RPDC 2003: 8.19). The following remain real challenges and have recently generated fifty recommendations for implementation. Air quality needs strategic planning and managing, both indoors and outdoors. Land resources are threatened by salinity, soil erosion and disturbance, degradation, tree decline, acid mine drainage, and water management. Inland waters and wetlands need improved planning and managing. There is no integrated, long-term approach to vegetation management at landscape scale. The impact of human settlement remains a complex challenge, as does cultural heritage and the processes needed to assess and to manage it. Coastal, estuarine and marine resources need integrated conservation and management processes. *Tasmania Together* reflects the community's long-term aspirations rather than comprehensive assessments with its four environmental goals, twenty-three environmental standards and fifty-one environmental indicators. But it does show progress both towards and away from environmental targets, those likely to be achieved, and those not, and has a highly sophisticated implementation procedure that ensures targets do not languish with no attention. It seems likely that Tasmania will move slowly towards greater sustainability, with *Tasmania Together* helping get it there, showing how sustainability planning and state planning can be integrated at the sub-national level.

Growing Victoria Together

A Top Down Strategic Process

Growing Victoria Together, is arguably also an Australian first for state planning as a comprehensive whole-of-government vision for a period of ten years covering economic, social and environmental objectives, with performance targets and an indication of how the government intends to meet them (Office of the Premier 2001)⁹. *Growing Victoria Together: Innovative State, Caring Communities (Growing Victorian Together)* was released in November 2001 and serves as a signpost document that defines priorities and future directions in the post-Kennett era. After the economic rationalism of the Kennett Liberal government, it seeks to bring the community and the environment back into policy focus, with the Bracks Labor Government looking for broader measures of progress and wellbeing (Ferguson 2001). It also provides a means for addressing criticisms about the number of reviews that the Labor Government had instigated and the early perceptions about its lack of actual on-ground action (Chappell 2001). Eleven strategic issues, forty-two priority actions and twenty-five progress measures are identified in *Growing Victoria Together* as a means of moving vision into reality. For each, the Government states its visions, outlines what it has achieved, and lists priority future actions, indicators for progress and details for further information. The issues and priority actions outlined guide budget choices and the directions of departments, with coordination through the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC 2001).

Nonetheless, there is significant room for more interactive approaches to policy-making.

A Plan that is Balanced rather than Integrated

Growing Victoria Together explicitly recognises that a broader measure of progress and common prosperity than economic growth alone is required (DPC 2001), reflecting the holistic intent of 'green planning' whereby sustainability goals are well integrated with planning in general (Buhrs 2000). 'Protecting the environment' and 'promoting sustainable development' are thus two key issues that the Government sees as important if their vision for Victoria is to be achieved. Whilst this lays the groundwork for achieving sustainability, in practice the chief obstacle to progress is the Government's failure to explicitly promote sustainability in terms of clear vision, expectations and responsibilities. Instead there remains a balancing rather than integrating

of economic, social and environmental goals and actions, a trading-off of the environment against competing concerns, and a limiting of the potential for whole-of-government and whole-of-community sustainability endeavours. The environment is left a discrete responsibility with discrete efforts made to protect it. Integrated approaches to sustainability are still required between departments, between levels of government, (local government in particular), between government and industry, across industry sectors and so forth. For as long as environmental protection and sustainable development remain discrete areas of interest, then *Growing Victoria Together* will logically fail to meet the criteria for environmental policy integration proposed by Scrase and Sheate (2002).

A Plan Lacking Interactive Opportunities

Growing Victoria Together is a government vision, a top down approach to policy-making that is better thought of as a 'document' rather than a 'process'. The principal mechanism for public contributions was a Summit of key stakeholders that was held in March 2000, eighteen months prior to its release. Of the 100 participants, only two represented environmental interests, reflecting its lack of priority with the Government at the time. There were also no formal transparent opportunities for public input, nor was there any public dialogue about future directions for Victoria. More targeted and exclusive approaches to policy-making were adopted that have been criticised for involving extensive taxpayer funded opinion polling that sought to identify exactly what voters thought the priorities of the Government should be (Hannah 2001). The Government has however adopted a range of other approaches for gaining feedback such as Community Cabinets, requesting feedback through the *Growing Victoria Together* website, and other community engagement mechanisms. Nonetheless, there is significant room for more interactive approaches to policy-making. A more interactive approach on a major initiative like *Growing Victoria Together* has the potential to create dynamic policy space and to give real meaning to its notion of strengthening the community.

A Plan that is Informed and Informing?

Whilst *Growing Victoria Together* comprehensively covers the major policy arenas of health, education, jobs, environment, etc, and clearly focuses on issues of concern to Victorians, it is not a strategy that appears to be based upon systematic analysis or public discussion. In terms of sustainability, for example, it is not necessarily linked to key assessments either, such as the Victorian Catchment Management Council's assessment of the health of Victoria's catchments

(2002). The selection of issues for attention, such as the restoration of environmental flows to the Snowy River, can then appear to be more 'iconic' or politically necessary, than informed by available evidence. Temporal aspects also require that the *Growing Victoria Together* plan be nested within a well-informed thirty to fifty year ecological horizon to make any sense in terms of sustainability. There is also scope for *Growing Victoria Together* to be both informed and assessed by Victoria's recently established Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability¹⁰. Unfortunately, the Bracks Government has been slow to resurrect State of Environment reporting abolished by the Kennett Government in 1992. However, once produced by the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, this reporting has the potential to better inform *Growing Victoria Together*.

A Plan that is Institutionalised?

Growing Victoria Together represents a medium-long term strategic vision for Victoria. However, because it is the product of a particular government rather than the result of a broad ranging and broadly based community development process like *Tasmania Together*, its political shelf life and its associated vision and priorities are relatively tenuous. The institutionalisation and assessment of *Growing Victoria Together* is not helped either by its lack of clear goals, clear funding sources over clear periods of time and with responsibilities and implementation pathways. There is also no transparent mechanism for independent monitoring and evaluation, despite a commitment to regular progress reports (DPC 2001, pp 30-31). The establishment of a Victorian statutory authority like the independent *Tasmania Together* Progress Board could reverse these deficiencies, and secure public discursive space within which the people could debate and influence their future. This would probably represent the greatest leap forward for sustainability in Victoria. It would provide an avenue for considering critical long-term issues, such as the state's over reliance on green house gas intensive brown coal, the long-term threats from dryland salinity and soil acidification (Victorian Catchment Management Council 2002), and the multiple threats that result in stressed landscapes (Morgan 2001).

Achieving Sustainability in Victoria

Whilst *Growing Victoria Together* is a significant political achievement that creates policy space for a wider view of wellbeing and prosperity, it also serves to highlight that much more needs to be done to progress environmental sustainability. But it has much to learn

from the *Tasmania Together* process. In particular, that it is possible to have community led and owned strategic discussions about long-term futures for a state and that these processes can be bipartisan as well as institutionalised. Such processes could provide a clear mechanism for having the broad-based discussions about environmental sustainability issues, indeed more broadly about sustainability. These debates need to occur in a manner that is community owned and led, yet supported and mandated by government. In terms of environmental sustainability, however, the reinstitution of an independent and robust State of Environment reporting process is an urgent first priority that will enhance Victoria's prospects for meeting the challenges it faces right now and well into the future. There is also scope to formally link *Growing Victoria Together* goals and processes to the efforts of the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability to position Victoria as a world leader in environmental sustainability practices.¹¹

CONCLUSIONS—ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY?

This paper has considered options for achieving sub-national environmental sustainability, by reviewing conceptual terrain, by establishing requirements for sustainability policy processes, and by analysing contrasting state frameworks for their potential for pursuing sustainability. We have argued that environmental sustainability requires a comprehensive approach in policy terms, in recognition of the nature and magnitude of the issues at stake, with interactive policy-making, integrated sustainability objectives, well informed and informing practices, and the institutionalisation of robust support. The *Tasmania Together* and *Growing Victoria Together* state planning processes have been examined as potential sustainability vehicles with these and the OECD's requirements in mind primarily because these processes are macro, environmental, social and economic policy setting tools. It was the processes surrounding these state plans rather than their content that was examined in this paper, in acknowledgment of the OECD's observation that sustainability governance remains a major challenge in OECD nations, in terms of policy coherence and integration in particular. Our review of the two state plans should not be mistaken for an endorsement of their achievements, however, but rather as recognition of their potential for the pursuit of environmental sustainability, in spite of any of the shortcomings we have observed.

Tasmania Together and *Growing Victoria Together* are indeed very different attempts at setting state policy that do set out environmental, social and economic objectives, and mark a resurgence in more strategic approaches to state planning and policy-making. They did adopt quite contrasting approaches to their state

planning design, with Tasmania pursuing a grass-roots, but well supported, administered and implemented approach, and Victoria opting for a more traditional top down, partisan, possibly shorter-lived planning exercise. Whilst *Tasmania Together* is in general a reflection of community priorities, *Growing Victoria Together* is in general a reflection of political priorities, including the need to re-emphasise social and environmental aspects of decision-making. In terms of the criteria discussed in this paper, on balance both plans require major reconsideration if they are to become adequate to the task of delivering sub-national sustainability. *Tasmania Together* does have better integrative practice, with bottom up deliberation, well institutionalised processes, strong links to knowledge production, and a commitment to addressing knowledge deficits in the interests of improved policy. And whilst we were critical of the exclusive planning style of *Growing Victoria Together*, we do acknowledge the key strategic role that this state plan has played in reorienting policy away from an exclusive framework of economic rationalism.

There is also a sense that both plans are committed to the rather dated notion of balancing.

In the OECD's terms, however, common to both plans is the lack of well-articulated appreciation of the meaning of sustainability, and a clear political and policy commitment to achieving it. Having said that, *Tasmania Together* is a sophisticated planning exercise with all the mechanisms in place to steer sustainability efforts should these ever be made, with effective processes for ongoing stakeholder involvement, and with the capacity to utilise and effectively manage information. *Growing Victoria Together* is differently situated, not only without a participative planning process, but without the necessary cross-sectoral mechanisms in place to steer any sustainability efforts, and most critically without any robust, independent state of environment reporting process to inform such efforts. There is also a sense that both plans are committed to the rather dated notion of balancing rather than integrating the environment with other concerns, encouraging it to be traded off for instance against economic objectives, which is a major limitation in terms of sustainability. It is probably a positive beginning that both plans are at least rhetorically underpinned by environmental concerns, if not overtly committed to sustainability, its practical implications or applications. We conclude that, whilst *Tasmania Together* and *Growing Victoria Together* reflect the efforts of re-engaged states, they lack practical orientation towards environmental sustainability that needs attention if environmental decline is to be reversed and sustainable development fostered.

ENDNOTES

- 1 This research has been supported by the Public Administration Research Trust Fund. We would like to acknowledge and thank the fund for its assistance. We would also like to thank the reviewers for their helpful comment.
- 2 Dr Kate Crowley is a Senior Lecturer with the School of Government and Deputy Dean of Graduate Research at the University of Tasmania. She was a member of the Tasmanian State of Environment's Sustainability Working Group and since beginning this paper has been appointed to the Tasmania *Together* Progress Board, although her views here remain her own. Brian Coffey is a PHD candidate in the School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences, University of Queensland.
- 3 In terms of limitations, whilst both of these state plans were recently reviewed, this paper considers their initial versions. It focuses on environmental aspects of sustainability, not sustainability in the societal and economic sense.
- 4 Again in the interests of scope we will not be addressing indicator development in this paper, but focusing upon the broader political and administrative context for the subsequent detailed development of indicators.
- 5 This proposal emerges from our ongoing work looking at new governance, green planning and sustainability.
- 6 Aspects of this sub-section draw on Coffey and Major forthcoming with some changes.
- 7 Integrated information resources; Integration of environmental concerns into governance; Vertically integrated planning and management; Integration across environmental media; Integrated environmental management (regions); Integrated environmental management (production); Integration of business concerns into governance; The environment, economy and society; Integration across policy domains; Integrated environmental—economic modelling; Integration of stakeholders into governance; Integration among assessment tools; Integration of equity concerns into governance; and, Integration of assessment into governance.

- 8 The Tasmania *Together* Progress Board comprises seven members who collectively are broadly representative of the Tasmanian community to be appointed after seeking nominations from members of the public and taking into account an appropriate gender and regional balance, and a person who is selected from a list provided by the University of Tasmania, and a person who is appointed to an office created under section 29 of the State Service Act 2000 (Tasmania *Together* Progress Board Act 2001, No 50 of 2001, Part 2 (6).
- 9 Adams and Wiseman (2002) provide a useful insiders account of the development and rationale underpinning *Growing Victoria Together* and how it fits within the Bracks Labor Government's approach to governance.
- 10 Although it should be noted that the Commissioner's independence is relatively limited, that the Commissioner is without the capacity to freely obtain information, and that the Commissioner's brief lacks a clear whole of government focus (*Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003*).
- 11 The Department of Sustainability and Environment recently released its first environmental sustainability framework.

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